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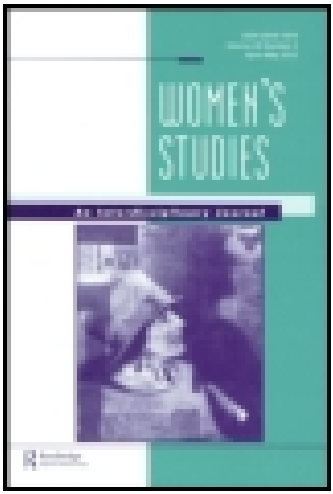

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"Share Moments, Share Life": The Domestic Photograph as a Symbol of Disruption and Trauma in The Lovely Bones

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"SHARE MOMENTS, SHARE LIFE": THE DOMESTIC PHOTOGRAPH AS A SYMBOL OF DISRUPTION AND TRAUMA IN *THE LOVELY BONES*

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As Alice Sebold's 2002 novel *The Lovely Bones* opens, Susie Salmon, the fourteen-year-old narrator, is already dead—raped and murdered by her neighbor, George Harvey, as she walked home from school. The novel is an account of how Susie and her family learn to cope with loss: Susie learns to accept the loss of her former Earthly life and adapt to an afterlife in her own personal heaven, where she watches as her family threatens to disintegrate as they struggle to confront the horror of Susie's death. In particular, the novel explores Susie's mother's struggle with her maternal role. Her daughter's violent death results in Abigail examining and questioning not the, perhaps, expected topic of her failure to protect her daughter, but rather the unresolved conflict that results from Abigail admitting that she has never fully embraced motherhood. Abigail's individuality and sense of selfhood has all but disappeared beneath the persona of Mother and Susie's death is the unlikely catalyst for the reemergence of Abigail's sense of self. This essential change in Abigail is in part represented by two photographs: one of Abigail and the other of Susie.

What happens, then, to the ubiquitous visual representation of the American family, the family photograph, when the mother-daughter dynamic is interrupted by violent death? In *The Lovely Bones*, the daughter's murder and the resulting trauma to the family transforms the domestic photograph into a symbol of disruption. However, as the protagonists move from trauma to nostalgia, the function of the photograph makes a similar move. Marianne Hirsch

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calls fictional textual representations of photographs "meta-photographic texts" and argues that "only in the context of this meta-photographic textuality and in this self-conscious textuality can photographs disrupt a familiar narrative about family life and its representations, breaking the hold of a conventional and monolithic familial gaze" (8). I agree that while the textual representations of photographs in this work do "disrupt" the narrative of the family in that they expose Abigail's unexpected and hidden resistance to motherhood, they ultimately reinforce the conventions of both the family photograph and the family itself.

In *The Lovely Bones*, photographs stand in for the dead and become a metaphor for the living traumatized family. These two uses of the photograph, though, occur through very different kinds of photographs. There are multiple copies of the school photograph of the murdered daughter, Susie, taken not long before her death, and this picture functions differently for each person who owns a copy; while it serves to prompt each individual's memory of Susie, it also substitutes for her missing body. Unlike the photograph of the dead girl, the photographs of the living allow insight into the living subject rather than introspection by the viewer. The viewer's insight into the photographic subject's interiority is particularly evident in the way in which various characters read a photograph of Susie's mother, Abigail.

The Two Faces of Trauma in *The Lovely Bones*

The novel is told from Susie's perspective after her death and is narrated by Susie, who observes her family, friends, and killer from a heaven that adapts to her needs and wishes—apart from the one wish she can never have: to return to her family and life. Susie watches as her mother begins to withdraw from the family as she attempts to come to terms with Susie's murder. Susie's father, Jack, and her younger sister Lindsey begin to assume some of the maternal functions of the household, such as caring for Susie's young brother Buckley, while her mother, Abigail, pulls further away from the family. Eventually Abigail abandons the family altogether and runs away to California for a number of years; in her absence, her role is partially filled by her mother, Susie's grandmother. Abigail returns home to Pennsylvania only when Jack is hospitalized after suffering a heart attack. At the

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novel's conclusion, Abigail has reassumed the maternal role, while the now-adult Lindsey is married with her own daughter, Abigail Suzanne.[1]

Meanwhile, Susie spends much of the novel in a kind of limbo where her heavenly existence parallels her life, but does not imitate it. Instead, she has been given her "simplest dreams." Poised in life to attend high school, in her personalized heaven she lives in proximity to a high school where there are no teachers and which she only enters for art class (18). And she has been assigned "an intake counselor," Fran, who is roughly the same age as her mother and who performs a heavenly maternal role, reinforcing the centrality of the maternal: women cannot escape the role of nurturer, even after death.

Two photographs function as motifs throughout this novel. One is a photograph Susie takes of her mother that is described in some detail. This photograph is viewed by a number of characters, all of whom react differently to it. The other significant photograph is Susie's school photograph. Unlike the photograph of Abigail, multiple copies of this photograph exist. This photographic representation of the dead girl functions differently to that of the photograph of Abigail. This photograph does not provide access to its subject's interiority, as if only the living have such interiority.[2] Instead, it allows the viewer to learn something about him or herself and their relationship with Susie. For Abigail and for Susie's school friend Ray, this photograph also comes to metaphorically replace Susie's unrecovered body.

Missing from this novel are photographs of family groups that would function as a visual model for the family, indicating what a family should look like. The photograph can portray the disparity between the photographic family and the actual family, with the photographic family representing an idealized "normality." Susie's violent death in *The Lovely Bones* precludes normality; instead, the family struggles to simply survive. Almost all the photographs

[1]While the novel encourages the reader to see the new generation representing a future that moves beyond the trauma of Susie's murder, the repetition of the names also suggests the inability to move beyond the trauma and the threat of repetition, illustrating Cathy Caruth's point that "catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through them" (*Unclaimed* 1).

[2]This point seems obvious, but Susie certainly develops or matures emotionally after her death, hence its relevance.

described in *The Lovely Bones* contain images of just one person.[3] Julia Hirsch argues that in order to be a family photograph, it needs to contain "at least two people" in order to indicate a "blood tie" (3). I would argue that photographs such as the picture of Abigail can be considered a family photograph when viewed by members of her family who would recognize the relationship, but would not be considered a family photograph by someone outside the family. The absence, though, of more conventional family groupings in *The Lovely Bones* indicates the tenuous condition of the family as well as the impossibility of visually representing violent disruption to the family.

The only reference to conventional family photographs, which Lindsey recalls in flashes of memory when she breaks into Susie's murderer George Harvey's house, demonstrates how this family cannot be represented in a photograph. When Lindsey breaks into Harvey's house, she is flooded with memories: "she couldn't stop the memories slamming into her" (179). Lindsey's memory is activated by the combination of the familiar and strange of Harvey's house. Sparked by the difference between her own home and Harvey's house, despite its identical floor plan, Harvey's house evokes memories of her childhood that include the recollection of photographs taken by her mother to record family events and holidays. These photos, though, preserve neither the family itself nor memories of the family. The pictures were "always fuzzy" and the eyes of the two sisters "bright red spots" (180). While these inadequate pictures become, after Susie's death and through Lindsey's recollection, a metaphor for the traumatized family, they also demonstrate the impossibility of the photographic preservation of memory. Susie knows that none of these photographs "would hold for posterity the moments before and the moments after" (180). Although Nicholas Mirzoeff states, "the importance of photography stem[s] from its most obvious capability: its rendering of a precise moment in time," the static nature of the photograph ensures all moments outside those preserved by the shutter's click cease to exist (68),

[3]With one exception, the only photographs that are described in this novel are of individuals. Susie's sister Lindsey alludes to earlier photographs taken by Abigail that were "always fuzzy," hinting at the trauma to come. This near absence of the family group picture seems significant in a family that, before Susie is murdered, appears to conform to all the norms of convention.

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and the text's recognition of the limitations of the photograph confirm Roland Barthes's theory that photographs counter, rather than preserve, memory.

The Photograph's Power to Unmask

The photograph Susie takes of Abigail represents the fractured and damaged family. Taken before Susie was killed, the photograph reveals the repressed selfhood that Abigail believed she had successfully concealed beneath the façade of motherhood. Susie's awareness of this hidden aspect of Abigail foreshadows the disruption to the family of both Susie's death and Abigail's departure. Not only is it a photograph of a mother without her children, but it also makes Susie aware of Abigail outside her role of mother for the first time. Susie seeing her mother as an individual, while not necessarily foreshadowing her own death, does indicate the underlying tensions in the family that are exposed by Susie's death.

The violence of Susie's death shuts down the photographic moment; the only photographs described in the novel are taken before Susie is killed, and, for the most part, the characters read these existing pictures through the lens of Susie's death. The one exception is the photograph Susie takes of Abigail. Susie's post-mortem narrative allows her to relate her reaction to seeing the photograph as soon as it was developed; she gives details of how, before her death, she interprets both the taking and viewing of the photograph. Susie finds her camera early in the morning of her eleventh birthday (not waiting to be given it as a gift in the traditional birthday gift-giving ritual), loads it with film and "stalks" her initial prey—a neighbor walking down the street—mimicking her aspired profession of wildlife photographer. Susan Sontag sees "something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them by seeing them as they never see themselves" and this description of violation certainly applies to the subsequent picture Susie takes of Abigail (14).[4] On reaching the backyard, Susie unexpectedly comes

[4]According to John A. Kouwenhoven, " the earliest recorded use of the word [snapshot] was in the diary of an English sportsman . . . who in 1808 noted almost every bird he got was by snapshot meaning hurried shot taken without deliberate aim" (qtd. in Chalfen 72). Chalfen notes, though, the deliberate nature of domestic snapshots: how they are carefully posed and composed.

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across her mother, alone in the backyard, as she has never seen her before; she had "never seen her sitting so still, so *not there* somehow" (original emphasis, 42). She recognizes Abigail as being "not [her] mother, but something separate from [her]" (43). For the first time, Susie sees her mother as a person, not just someone she had "never seen as anything but Mom" (43). But this shift is not fully articulated. Susie uses "something" and "anything" to describe her mother, indicating that for the eleven-year-old Susie, Abigail the individual is completely subsumed beneath her maternal function. Susie's instinct is to photograph this woman she sees as being behind the label of "mom." However, this person, or at least her eyes, is "frightening" to Susie; she is unnerved by the awareness that her mother has an independent identity.

The resulting photograph does indeed capture Abigail the individual rather than Susie's mother. This photograph is taken "before the click startled her into the mother of the birthday girl, owner of the happy dog, wife to the loving man, and mother again to another girl and a cherished boy" (43). The resulting emotionally naked picture of Abigail violates a number of the conventions of domestic photography and instead shows how a candid photograph can reveal what Karen Becker calls "a higher truth" about its subject (300). Becker argues that candid photographs of "unguarded moments" often look awkward and violate the rules of composition, with poor lighting and uneven focus; she notes that we approach photographs from within "the cultural practices we use to distinguish between nature and artifice," and these cultural practices, which also apply to how fictional characters approach the narrative devices of fictional photographs, are recognized by other photographic theorists (300).

According to Richard Chalfen, family photographs are interpreted through "several orders of assumptions" which inform both the taking and viewing of photographs (125). These assumptions include the presumption that the photographed event actually took place and that "activities depicted in these images happened 'naturally'" with the subjects in the picture having "full knowledge that an operating camera was present and being used by a known person" (126). Attempting to view family photographs without these apparently universal assumptions would, Chalfen argues, "cause too much concern, confusion and unwanted doubt for ordinary people" (121). Patricia Holland extends these assumptions to the

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subject of the photograph. She argues that "personal photographs are made specifically to portray the individual . . . as *they would wish to be seen* and as they have chosen to show themselves" (original emphasis, 107).

The photograph Susie takes of Abigail clearly transgresses some of these conventions while conforming to others. Because Susie snaps the picture without permission, she is not functioning as the domestic photographer is expected to function. According to Holland, taking pictures is "a pastime that secures friendship and insists on interaction between photographer and subject," but this interaction is absent in this particular photograph Susie takes of her mother (128). Ulrich Baer argues that photography has the ability to "confront the viewer with a moment that had the potential to be experienced but perhaps was not. In viewing such photographs we are witnessing a mechanically recorded instant that was not necessarily registered by the subject's own consciousness" (8). Abigail is not aware of this particular picture being taken, consequently not only is there no interaction between subject and photographer, but Abigail is undoubtedly not choosing to show this aspect of her persona. As soon as she becomes aware of Susie's presence, "the mother inside her awoke as it did every morning" (43).

Abigail's resistance to the role of mother is reflected in the way this snapshot resists these photographic conventions; it is not posed, it represents no significant family event such as Christmas, and its subject is entirely unaware of the photographer's presence. Consequently, the snapshot of Abigail seems to expose the mask of motherhood that she assumes and that is not apparent outside of the photograph, reminiscent of the "many masks" Barthes sees his mother wearing in all but the Winter Garden photograph (109). And like the Winter Garden photograph, this picture of Abigail reveals the hidden "soul" that seems unrelated to motherhood (109).

Susie is disturbed by seeing her mother so exposed and the desire to record this moment photographically is "an instinct, not a developed thought" (43). The instinctive thought is like an undeveloped photograph, full of latent potential. The full meaning of this photograph lies dormant until after Susie's death. The belated understanding of the photograph (by Susie as well as her sister and father) results in the photograph taking on the latent

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quality of the traumatic moment. As Baer points out, traumatic experiences "attain meaning only at and through . . . belated repetition—like negatives that harbor an image until they are printed and emerge from the developing vats" (10). According to Baer, "the shutter's click allows certain moments to be integrated *for the first time* into a context (of experience, of memory, of meaning)" (original emphasis, 12). While the shutter's click preserved this particular image of Abigail, it cannot be placed in context until viewed through the lens of Susie's death.

According to Sontag, "picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with ever more peremptory rights—to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on" (9) and Susie's photograph of her mother is indeed invasive. The camera acts like a physical barrier between photographer and subject as if the photographer can efface herself by hiding behind the protective camera. The camera, then, grants the photographer a kind of immunity from normal interaction with the subject, which is why, as Sontag says, "photography is essentially an act of non-intervention" (12). Sontag points out, though, that "even if incompatible with intervention in a physical sense, using a camera is still a form of participation . . . [and] a way of . . . encouraging whatever is going on to keep happening" (12). Ironically, Susie's act of photographing Abigail stops what is happening. When Susie looks at the developed photographs, "there was only one picture in which [her] mother was Abigail" (43). The act of taking the picture results in Abigail being "startled" into resuming her familiar maternal persona.

While the picture of Abigail seems to resist the conventions associated with the taking of the snapshot, the way in which it is read by the novel's characters, and the way in which readers are encouraged to read the ekphrastic photograph, conforms to conventions of reading a photographic image. The viewer of a snapshot, according to Chalfen, will have some familiarity with the subject matter and will, therefore, be able to supply any missing information (127). And Alan Sekula suggests that the readability of the photograph is dependent on cultural familiarity with the conventions of photography (86). The most persistent cultural assumption associated with the photograph, though, is that the camera does not lie, an assumption that Baer acknowledges when he points out how "we continue to perceive photographs as

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records of what is. . . . The things we see in photographs seem real to us" (3). This assumption holds for how the other fictional characters read the picture of Abigail.

The photograph of Abigail reveals her unknown interiority to its viewers. When Susie's sister Lindsey finds this photo after Susie's death, the unexpected nature of this image of her mother is so powerful that she has a physical reaction to it: "A deep breath rushed out of her, and she sat down on the floor, her mouth still open and her hand still holding the picture. The tethers were rushing and whipping around her, like a canvas tent come loose from its stakes. She too . . . until the morning of that photograph, had never seen the mother-stranger" (44). Susie had deliberately concealed this photograph from everyone else, jealously guarding her secret knowledge that her mother "was also someone else—someone mysterious and unknown" (45). The mother has moved from being "something" when Susie first sees her in this way to being "someone." Susie wants to keep this unknown aspect of her mother to herself as if it somehow gives her relationship with her mother an added dimension: the illusion of being close to her mother when she really is not, for even in life, Susie never shares the same emotional intimacy with her mother as she does her father.

In *Camera Lucida,* Roland Barthes expresses his frustration that, no matter how much he enlarges his mother's photograph, he is never able to reach her "very being" (99). For Susie in *The Lovely Bones* the reverse is true; she is apparently only able to see into her mother's "very being" through the medium of photography. But the conventions governing the reading of a photograph encourage such an interpretation. We believe, or want to believe, that the photograph reveals the truth, that it cannot lie. Therefore the way in which we look at the photograph, how we have been encultured to read it, leads to an absolute interpretation of the photograph. If Susie sees Abigail in the photograph as emotionally naked, she does not consider this as only her interpretation of the photograph, but proof of Abigail's state of mind at the time the photograph was taken. Similarly, when Susie's father Jack looks at the other photographs Susie takes of her mother, he sees them as evidence of what he, or at least marriage and motherhood, has done to Abigail. The novel encourages the reader to consider these photographs in the same way—that they do

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indeed expose a heretofore unseen Abigail. The pervasive presence of the domestic snapshot throughout the novel indicates the emotional power of the photograph. A photograph needs no explanation and it evokes an immediate emotional response in the fictional viewer that resonates with the reader: we understand the character's reaction to a photograph because we are also encultured to react in a similar way. What we are reacting to, though, is the mediated presentation of the fictional photograph; all we have are Susie's, Lindsey's and Jack's interpretations of the photographs, and these interpretations reveal the emotional state of the character reading the photograph rather than give insight into Abigail. In the end, because we are rarely given direct insight into Abigail through Abigail herself, she remains as unknowable as Barthes's mother.

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Trauma, Nostalgia, and the Photograph

If Abigail's photograph is a visual metaphor for the fractured family that results from Susie's death, then the school photograph of Susie visually represents her missing body while also serving as a site of memorial, illustrating Barthes's notion that the photograph is "death in the future" (92). This photograph differs markedly from the one Susie takes of Abigail. Not only is this picture not a domestic snapshot—it is a professional photograph that is formally posed and composed—but multiple copies of it exist. We know about three of them: Abigail has one that she keeps in her wallet and Ray Singh, Susie's school friend, also has one. In addition, Len Fenerman, the police detective, has a copy and uses it to reproduce Susie's image on posters and fliers. This is the only photograph of Susie mentioned in the novel as if the trauma to the family caused by Susie's violent death is marked by an absence; Susie is only visually represented in isolation, seemingly unable to exist within the context of the family.

In addition, the absence of the conventional family photograph is a metaphor for the absence of nostalgia, which in itself indicates the inability to mourn. Mieke Bal argues that "to enter memory, the traumatic event of the past needs to be made 'narratable.'" She notes that "cultural artifacts such as photographs . . . can mediate between the parties to the traumatizing scene" (x). Baer reads the photograph "not as the parceling-out

and preservation of time but as an access to another kind of experience that is explosive, instantaneous, distinct—a chance to see in a photograph not narrative, not history, but possibly trauma" (6).

The photograph, like trauma, presents a gap, an absence, for the viewer—the viewer can never experience the moment of the photograph.[5] The link between the photographic moment and the traumatic moment can be traced to the difference between occurrence and experience. Both the photographic moment and traumatic moment historically occurred, but neither the victim of trauma nor the viewer of the photograph experience that moment. Barthes explains that the effect of the photograph "is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed" (82). What Barthes sees in a photograph is "not a memory, an imagination, a reconstitution, . . . but reality in a past state: at once the past and the real" (82). The photograph contains visual evidence of the photographic moment, confirming that the moment occurred, but only the subject and photographer have first hand experience of that moment, and even that experience is mediated by the camera's lens. The viewer of the photograph is forever excluded from experiencing the photographic moment.

The photograph that is "painful" in its portrayal of one who has since died, like the picture of Barthes's mother or the photograph of Susie in *The Lovely Bones*, begins to function much like traumatic memory: "nothing in it can transform grief into mourning" (Barthes 90). This connection to trauma is strengthened by Barthes's belief that the photograph is "false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination. . . . On the one hand 'it is not there,' on the other 'but it has indeed been'" (115). The concept of loss and temporality found in the photograph is central to trauma theory.

In particular, Cathy Caruth's work on trauma resonates with Barthes' work on the photograph. According to Caruth:

[5]Even if the viewer and subject of the photograph are the same, the subject/viewer can never fully experience the moment. Any posed photograph artificially interrupts the event to record it photographically and a subject can never experience a candid shot as a photographic moment as, by its very nature, the subject is always oblivious to the candid photographic moment. The argument can be made that only the photographer truly experiences this moment, but even that experience is mediated by the camera's intrusive presence.

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> The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience: since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place and in another time. (8)

Like the photographic moment, the traumatic moment cannot be experienced, as if the victim of trauma is the viewer rather than the subject of the traumatic moment. The photograph visually records a moment in time, and the traumatic event is also a historical temporal event; unlike the photograph though, the traumatic event cannot exist in the same tangible way as a photograph.

Looking at trauma theory and photographic theory together, then, the relationship between trauma and the photograph is clear. What the photograph and the traumatic experience share is the inability for the participant (or, in the case of photograph, the viewer) to fully perceive the event when it happens. Baer defines trauma as being a "disorder of memory and time," a description which equally fits the photograph (9). If trauma is the gap that is the actual experience and is only experienced through forgetting, then the photograph is equally temporally problematic, depicting as Barthes says, "a defeat of Time" (96). For Susan Sontag, a photograph is "incontrovertible truth that a thing happened" (56) and Barthes sees a photograph as evidence of "the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph", that "*the thing has been there*" (original emphasis, 76). But the photograph is always accompanied by an inevitable sense of loss. The loss associated with the photograph is partly nostalgic—the photograph represents "reality in a past state"—as it can never restore the past state, only attest that it indeed existed. The loss, though, is also temporal. Barthes sees the photograph depicting "an anterior future of which death is the stake" (96). This concept of the anterior future is one of the paradoxes of the photograph. It shows something that has already happened in the past of the viewer but has yet to happen in the future of the subject.[6] Therefore, all photographs, according to

[6]Barthes's mother, for example, remains photographically frozen as a child, yet she grew up, married and became a mother. None of this future is apparent in the photograph.

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Barthes, are a representation of death: "whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (96).

Baer builds on Barthes's notion of loss in making the argument that "photographs compel viewers to think of lived experience, time and history from a standpoint that is truly a stand *point*: a place to think about occurrences that may fail, violently, to be fully experienced and so integrated into larger patterns" (original emphasis, 1). He believes "some images bypass painstaking attempts at contextualization and deliver, straight up and apparently across the gulf of time between viewer and photographically mummified past, a potent illusion of the real" (2). Baer's work also calls for reconceptualizing how we consider history and time as captured in "images revealing experiences that have not been, and possibly cannot be, assimilated into a . . . a continuous narrative" (1). He argues that history is an "on-going narrative" and that photographs of trauma, as representations of trauma itself, can never be assimilated into that narrative, and in doing so, develops Cathy Caruth's discussion of the unassimilable nature of trauma. According to Caruth, "the traumatized . . . carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (5). Baer uses this notion of "impossible history" in his discussion of the relationship between the photograph and trauma in photographs that actually depict the traumatic moment, such as Charcot's pictures of hysterical women in the nineteenth century or Nazi photographs of the Lódź ghetto. Unlike these photographs, the photographs discussed here are not photographs of trauma, having been taken before the traumatic event. The meaning of the photograph, however, changes after the traumatic event.

Caruth says "in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness" and she notes a quality that appears to be common to all traumatic experience: "the inability to witness the event as it occurs, or the ability to witness the *event* fully only at the cost of witnessing oneself. Central to the very immediacy of this experience, that is, is a gap that carries the force of the event and does so precisely at the expense of simple knowledge and memory" (6–7). The photograph seems at first to fill this gap, becoming, as Barthes says, "the general and somehow natural witness of 'what has been'" (93).

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But Barthes's statement presumes a representation of "what has been," that the photograph actually represents the traumatic memory. In *The Lovely Bones*, all the photograph can represent is the traumatic absence—of a child, a mother or an intact family. Baer argues that "when viewers face the traces of experiences that bypass memory and cognition, the ordinarily reassuring mechanisms of identificatory looking reach their limit" and the ways in which the characters react to what, in other circumstances, would be unremarkable commonplace photographs are examples of how the photographs here do not reassure but emphasize the traumatic moment (13).

Events that can be defined as traumatic are fairly easily recognized. Caruth, paraphrasing Freud, defines trauma as "a wound not upon the body but upon the mind" (*Unclaimed* 3). According to trauma theorist Jenny Edkins, "events that give rise to trauma generally involve force and violence. . . . Sometimes it also involves witnessing the horrific deaths of others" (3). In addition, "the victim of trauma feels they were helpless in their encounter with death, violence and brutality" (Edkins 3). Susie's murder clearly meets this definition. But Edkins also argues "to be called traumatic—to produce what are seen as symptoms of trauma—an event has to be more than just a situation of utter powerlessness. . . . It has to involve a betrayal of trust as well. . . . What we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors" (4). In *The Lovely Bones*, these powers of protection (or rather failed protection) reside in the family; the perceived failure of the family is central to the traumatic experience. Susie is not protected by her family and the absence of the conventional family photograph comes to symbolize the risk to the family as an institution in this novel. For psychologists Lisa McCann and Laurie Anne Pearlman, "the most important portion of a traumatic memory is imagery, most often in the form of disturbing visual imagery. . . . Individuals often experience disturbing images as fragments, without context or meaning" (30). This imagery is made concrete within the novel through the metaphor of the photograph.

The relationship between the photograph and nostalgia is more obvious than that between photograph and trauma. In *The Lovely Bones*, the photograph and the changing ways in which the

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photograph is read partly enables the shift from traumatic to nostalgic memory. I do not want to suggest that the photograph itself is instrumental in this move, but instead argue that the way in which traumatized characters change their reading of a photograph indicates their transition out of the traumatized state. If we accept Fred Davis's argument that "the nostalgic evocation of some past state of affairs always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties," the role of the photograph becomes obvious (34). The photograph preserves the "past state," perpetuating the perceived safety of the time preceding the current state of distress. For example, in *The Lovely Bones*, the school photograph of Susie presents visual evidence of Susie alive, before the horror of her murder.

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The Photograph as the Site of Memorial

Susie's photograph has a dual purpose: it functions as her memorial and it also substitutes for her absent body. Only one small piece of Susie's dismembered body is recovered by the police, and although the reader knows what happens to the body, Susie's family never achieve the resolution that comes with the burial of a body. The lack of a body complicates the mourning process for Susie's family and friends. In her study of the rituals surrounding death, Christine Quigley affirms the significance of witnessing the final committal of a body. She notes, "when the body of a loved one is missing, survivors are robbed of the opportunity to bid it a last farewell, and often experience a lack of closure with regard to the death" (45).

In place of a funeral service for Susie, the community holds a memorial service. The impetus for the memorial comes not from Susie's family, but from the school principal, a representative of the community, illustrating Susan Letzler Cole's point that "the central *shareable* experience of death is the enactment of mourning"; it is a "communal experience" (original emphasis, 5). And Christian Metz believes funeral rites exist both as a way to remember the dead as well as to reinforce that they are dead and that "life continues for others" (141). The general features of the American funeral include "rapid removal of a corpse to a funeral parlor, embalming, institutionalized 'viewing,' and disposal by burial" (Metcalf and Huntington 194).[7] Susie's memorial

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services cannot fit this formula; while her actual body undergoes an unmarked burial (in a sinkhole) that does not approach the conventions of the funeral (and of which only the reader is cognizant), her photograph substitutes for her body. This connection between photography and mourning is not new. Memorial photographs were frequently embedded in nineteenth-century tombstones, and contemporary funerals often display photographs of the deceased as a visual memorial, reinforcing Metz's belief that "photography. . . fits into this complex psycho-social operation [of mourning], since it suppresses from its own appearance the primary marks of 'livingness,' and nevertheless conserves the convincing print of the object: a past presence" (141).

Both Abigail and Susie's friend Ray, who resist participating in the communal mourning of Susie's death, bury Susie's photographic body (in the absence of an actual body) in a metaphorical grave. A body prepared for burial by a mortician has a certain artificial look to it. The public viewing of a body necessitates "cosmetic restoration" (Metcalf and Huntington 194). This restoration, according to Quigley, "at its best . . . [gives] a look of serenity which compares favorably with our expectations that they now rest in peace" (44). The purpose of funerary restoration "does not so much cushion the blow as provide a picture of the deceased that the mind can refer to side by side with memories of the person while he or she was alive" (44). Susie's photograph takes on this slightly exaggerated corporeal aspect: her "cheeks never redder, [her] eyes never bluer than they were in the photograph" (265). The photograph as a substitute for a body illustrates the relationship between photography and death discussed by Metz who notes how photographs and death share the same characteristics of "immobility and silence" (140). He explores the peculiar relationship between the photograph and death in its most explicit sense in the "social practice of keeping photographs in memory of loved beings who are no longer alive" (140). Metz posits that unlike film, "which gives back to the dead a semblance of life," the photograph "by virtue of its signifier

[7]According to The Cremation Association of North America, while cremations are increasing, just over seventy percent of American deaths result in burial (http://www.cremationassociation.org).

(stillness, again) maintains the memory of the dead *as being dead*" (original emphasis, 141). Susie's photograph performs the function of reminding its viewer of her death; it also functions as a metaphorical corpse in the absence of an actual corpse.

Ray, Susie's friend from school and the first (and only) boy she kisses, does not attend either memorial service. Instead he "said goodbye . . . in his own way: by looking at a picture—[her] studio portrait" (111). The photograph, in all its artificiality, allows him to express grief for the dead Susie, but, more importantly, it gives him access to his own feelings about Susie and about death. By contemplating the photograph he mourns Susie and is able to "set [her] free"—something her family cannot do (112). Looking at the photograph is key to Ray's ability to let go of Susie because he "knew that no one ever really looked the way they did in photos" much as the restored body can never look like the animated living person (112). He sees death as meaning "lost, it meant frozen, it meant gone" (112). Photographic artist Christian Bolanski believes "the photograph [of the dead] replaces the memory. When someone dies, after a while you can't usually visualize them any more, you only remember them through your pictures" (qtd. in Perloff 40). Although Ray appears to internalize the memory of Susie without needing to see her image, "he didn't want to burn [her] photo or toss it away, but he didn't want to look at [her] anymore" (112). Carol Mavor notes that even though a photograph can deteriorate, in effect die, "like a body, we simply cannot throw it out. (We bury the dullest, even the ugliest, photographs in drawers and boxes.) To tear or to cut the photograph is a violent, frighteningly passionate, hysterical action, which leaves behind indexical wounds, irreparable scars" (119). Ray preserves Susie's photo in a volume of Indian poetry "in which he and his mother had pressed dozens of fragile flowers that were slowly turning to dust" (112). This resting place for the photograph is more like a conventional funeral than the memorial service. The photograph has metonymically taken on the properties of Susie's body, and its interment in the grave of the book implies that, like the flowers, the photograph will also turn to dust, evoking the words of the traditional Christian funeral service.

Susie is resurrected from her grave when, on Ray's departure for college, his mother packs the book of Indian poetry with the

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"long forgotten" photograph of Susie inside (225). The photo falls out of the book and Ray cannot "avoid them, the lips he had once kissed" (225). While Ray does not look at the photograph again, the sexualized nature of this more mature gaze reflects Susie's post-mortem maturation. In a memorable (if somewhat bizarre) scene towards the end of the novel, Susie briefly inhabits her friend Ruth's body so she can experience sexual fulfillment with Ray. The text indicates that this possession happens with Ruth's consent and Ray's awareness that he is sexually intimate with Susie, not Ruth. While Ray does not reference the photograph, its earlier exhumation appears to have paved the way for this ghostly coupling.

While Ray buries Susie's metaphoric body in the tomb of the book, Abigail conflates both body and gravesite in the photograph. This school picture is one of the photographs she takes with her to California, and the only photograph she has of Susie. For Abigail, this photo was "like the ubiquitous photo of a celebrity. She had encountered it so many times that [Susie] had been neatly buried inside of it" (265). Although Abigail looks at these family photographs every day, Susie's formal school portrait is "kept upside down," and is separate from the other photos. While Susie has been buried inside the photograph, the photo itself has been encased in the temporary coffin of the wallet. The isolation of the photograph symbolizes the death of Abigail's child, but also symbolizes how Abigail is stuck in the traumatic moment.

Although she attends the formal church service, held not long after Susie's death, Abigail's absence from the impromptu memorial in the cornfield held on the first anniversary of Susie's death is connected to her increasing resistance to her maternal role. The underlying tension that Susie sees in her mother's photograph surfaces after Susie's death, as if her failure to protect her daughter has not only made Abigail feel inadequate as a mother, but has resurrected her long-repressed desire for an identity outside motherhood. Abigail's reason for not attending Susie's memorial is that it is not "honoring [Susie's] memory. There are other ways to honor it" (206). When pushed by Lindsey to explain these "other ways," Abigail can only answer, "I want to be more than a mother" (207). I would argue that Abigail's resistance to fully inhabiting the conventions of motherhood is in part marked by the absence of the family photograph album.

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In this stereotypical American family the lack of an album where one could reasonably be expected seems to indicate that Abigail is not willing to accept an artificial construction of her family. She cannot see carefully chosen images of the woman she wishes she was, nor can she see a romanticized portrayal of a non-existent perfect family.

From Trauma to Nostalgia Through a Patriarchal Re-reading of the Photograph

When she hears about Jack's heart attack, Abigail rushes back to Pennsylvania from California, leaving Susie's photograph "propped up" against the trunk of a "tiny, struggling tree" at the airport (265–266). Abigail's final abandonment of the photograph signals the beginnings of a transition out of the traumatic state. That she relinquishes the photograph suggests that Abigail is overcoming the fundamental struggle Metz associates with mourning: to love the deceased "as *dead* instead of continuing to desire a living presence and ignoring the verdict of reality, hence prolonging the intensity of suffering," while also "claiming the right to live" (141). Perhaps Abigail leaving Susie's photograph at the airport and resuming her life in Pennsylvania indicates an acknowledgement of the reality of Susie's death that is inextricably tied to her acknowledgement of her ambivalent feelings towards motherhood.

On the plane, Abigail sits "alone on the middle of a row of three seats" (266). She could not but help think of how, if she were a mother traveling with her children, "there would be two seats filled beside her. . . . But though she was, by definition, a mother, she had at some point ceased to be one too" (266). Abigail considers being a mother "a calling," and because she had never felt that calling, "she had been punished in the most horrible and unimaginable way for never having wanted [Susie]" (266). Abigail is finally able to acknowledge that she never wanted to be a mother and implicitly rejects the maternal role: she returns for her husband, not for her children.

It seems that in this novel, trauma, as represented by the photograph, is gendered female while nostalgia is situated within patriarchy. Susie's father Jack does not remember Susie through the photograph; his memories are more visceral, remembering

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her through the ships-in-the-bottle they built together and her clothing, which he refuses to dispose of. When Susie first gets her camera, her father imposes authority over her; because Susie took so many pictures, Jack "forced her to choose which rolls . . . should be developed" (212). He also influences the subject of those photographs, giving Susie "hints on camera angles and composition" (239). Jack's own photographs of his daughters indicate a similar need for control that borders on humiliation. Susie says of her father that he was "the kind of dad who kept a nude photo of you when you were three in the downstairs bathroom, the one guests would use" (7). While Jack does not mourn Susie through her photograph, he is able to make the shift from trauma to nostalgia through re-reading the photographs Susie took before her death.

A number of rolls of Susie's photographs remain undeveloped for years after her death until Jack finally develops the last of the rolls of film Susie had marked "rolls to hold back" seven years after she was killed (238). In one way, it is as if the developing of the film marks Susie's coming-of-age—she would have been twenty-one—and the distance from the living Susie who took the photographs appears to have almost effaced the photographer's role in how the photographs are read. The delayed film developing, though, extends the photographer's role from beyond the grave, maintaining Susie's power over her parents. Susie takes photographs to "rescue the moment," to "stop time and hold it" (212). Doing so also gives her authority: "part of what I loved about photography was the power it gave me over the people on the other side of the camera, even my own parents" (240). Because the photographs are not developed or read until after Susie's death, they can only be read through the lens of Susie's death. What would have been considered mundane (indeed, not even worth printing) takes on new meaning. The delayed development of the film means that, even though Jack does not refer to Susie when looking at the pictures, she exerts a kind of ghostly authority over Jack's changing view of Abigail. The photographs allow Jack to see Abigail in a different way, and they contribute to Jack and Abigail's reconciliation.

Jack responds to the trauma of Susie's death differently to Abigail. Where Abigail retreats from her family, eventually leaving altogether, Jack "moved in a world where a crushing inevitability

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had robbed him of any hope of accurate perception" (238). Jack's trauma is multiplied by Abigail's defection. However, his repeated viewings of the last of Susie's photographs give him some kind of comfort and eventually help him move out of the traumatic state. Jack's repeated viewing of the photographs illustrates Baer's point that traumatic experiences "attain meaning only at and through . . . belated repetition" (10). Jack's retreat is emotional rather than physical, and he would take out the photographs when "he saw something on TV or read an article in the paper that made his heart ache" (239). Significantly, the numerous viewings of the photographs are only indirectly associated with the trauma of Susie's death. Susie is not the subject of the photos, and while the initial impetus for developing the film may have been to maintain a tangible connection with Susie, once Jack develops the film that includes multiple shots of Abigail, she becomes the focus of his gaze and the reason he looks at the pictures "too many times to count" (239).

Despite Jack's attempts to control Susie through her photography, she turns the tables on him, using photography to resist his authority. The first evidence of this photographic resistance is seen in the only photograph of Jack that appears in the novel. Although Jack "lectured [Susie] repeatedly" on the "foolhardy" nature of what she considered her "artistic shots," this single photograph of Jack is "the best portrait he ever had" (239). Taken at a strange angle "so his face filled the three-by-three square when you held it so it was a diamond," this picture of her father is unlike that of her mother; how her father is photographed emphasizes the position of the subject in the frame rather than illuminating the subject's interiority (239). The position of her father in the frame is significant; it is not conventionally oriented, as if reflecting some quality of her father or possibly her relationship with her father. And while the photograph itself needs to be oriented "like a diamond" in order to be properly viewed, the syntax of the sentence also implies that Jack's face, and Jack himself, can be compared to a diamond: incredibly precious, but at the same time extremely hard and non-malleable.

The photographs Susie takes of Abigail have the greatest emotional impact on Jack: they show "a woman he felt he barely knew" (239). As Susie is photographing Abigail, she hears Jack coming home from work and Susie has to work to keep her

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mother's attention. By the time Susie "snapped the last solitary shot of [her] mother [her] eyes had begun to seem distracted and anxious, diving under and up into a mask somehow. In the next photo, the mask was almost, but not quite, in place and the final photo where [Susie's] father was leaning slightly down to give her a kiss on the cheek—there it was" (240). When Jack looks at these photographs, he does not have insight into Abigail the way Susie and Lindsey do. They see the woman behind the mask of motherhood, but presumably Jack already knows this woman. Jack sees "a woman he felt he barely knew any more" (239). With repeated viewing of these photos, however, "he felt something growing inside him. . . . He had been falling in love all over again" (239). The way that Jack fetishizes his wife's photo illustrates Metz's equation of the photograph with the fetish. According to Metz, "the photographic *take* is immediate and definitive, like death and like the construction of the fetish in the unconscious, . . . unchanged and always active later" (original emphasis, 140). So the photos are not merely the two-dimensional image of Abigail; they enable Jack to see Abigail as Susie sees her and they work on a sentimental level, demonstrating Sontag's argument that "photographs actively promote nostalgia" (15). These photographs of Abigail, then, have two functions; they not only encourage the desire for an unreclaimable past, but they also begin to propel Jack into the future.[8] The power Susie sees in photography's control over the subject is extended here to the viewer. For Jack, the photograph illuminates his role in Abigail's defection; seeing Abigail change in the pictures, how her eyes become "distracted and anxious" on his entering the frame, he asks, "Did I do that to you?" (240).

This new awareness of Abigail's identity outside her roles as wife and mother results in a symbolic rereading of the first candid photograph Susie took of her mother. When Susie first saw the developed photograph, she hid it because the exposed Abigail conflicted too much with Susie's image of her mother as "mom" and because she wanted to be the only one to know that side of Abigail. The photo initially reveals a "loss" that Susie interprets as the loss of her mother (42). However, this sense of loss no longer

[8]Quoting David Lowenthal, Leo Spitzer defines nostalgia as "a signifier of 'absence' and 'loss' that could in effect never be made 'presence' and 'gain' except through memory and the creativity of reconstruction" (90).

exists at the end of the novel. Abigail eventually returns and sees the photograph of herself, now framed, in Susie's old bedroom where her own mother is now staying. Seeing this photo catalyzes Abigail back into a conventional maternal role. She declares her love for Susie, and this verbal declaration indicates to Susie that her mother now embraces emotions and behavior culturally expected of a mother. Her mother's move from resisting to conforming to the maternal role results in Susie revising her interpretation of the photo. She now sees it as simply depicting "a woman staring out across her misty suburban lawn" (318). While she still considers the photo her "secret portrait" of her mother, it no longer represents the disruption of the family (318). Rather, Susie's rereading of the photograph, now framed and publicly displayed in the multi-generational space of the bedroom occupied by both Abigail's mother and daughter, indicates that Abigail's assumption of her conventional roles within a patriarchal family has shifted this fractured family from trauma to a nostalgic sentimentality.

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